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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 26, 2020

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**CITY OF CHICAGO ANNOUNCES GRANT FUNDING TO SUPPORT ADDITIONAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CITY'S HISTORICALLY REGRESSIVE FINES AND FEES SYSTEM**

*Chicago joins ten other cities and counties in inaugural fine and fee reform cohort*

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Chicago City Clerk Anna M. Valencia today announced Chicago will receive a \$50,000 grant to further its work to address the City's historically regressive fines and fees system. Along with the grant funding, Chicago will also join ten additional cities and counties in the inaugural 'Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice' cohort for its innovative work to address the regressive fines and fees system throughout one of the nation's largest cities. The grant monies will be used to further the work Chicago has already made toward reimagining the historic structure which to date has included eliminating City sticker ticket debt for those who can least afford it; reduction of excessive late fees on the City Sticker program; elimination of license suspensions for non-driving violations; launch of a series of new payment plans that expand the options for paying off debt; and new pathways to compliance to help residents who are eligible avoid any number of the devastating consequences of onerous city debt – including water shut offs, tow and impound, and more.

“The simple fact is tens of thousands of our residents have been entangled in a web of debilitating payments, and, all too often, financial ruin, due to onerous and regressive fines and fees, with low-income families and people of color being hurt the most,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “This new grant funding will help Chicago take the next step in addressing this critical issue, while this new cohort raises this issue to a national level. Cities cannot afford to hold back their economic potential, particularly at a time of crisis. It's in all our interests to do everything we can to encourage every family to grow, pay their taxes, be part of our economy and build our shared future together. Here in Chicago, we've accomplished a lot in a short amount of time, but our work has only just begun.”



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In September 2019, the Chicago City Council approved the initial fines and fees reform package, its first step to ending the harmful enforcement practices that have historically impacted financially challenged communities at disproportionate levels. The proposed policies included input from dozens of advocacy groups and city departments, which were all members of the Fines, Fees & Access Collaborative, formed in December 2018 and led by City Clerk Anna M. Valencia. The City then rolled out the reform package in two phases with some aspects coming online immediately, and others taking effect later in 2019.

“I am thrilled to a part of today’s grant announcement,” said Clerk Valencia. “This funding is critical to helping our city continue its efforts to restructure our fines and fines practices. We have seen first-hand what happens when you give residents a fighting chance. Our goal has always been to create a city that works for every resident and this grant will help us continue to do just that.”

These efforts brought critical relief to the tens of thousands of city residents who accumulate delinquent debt each year, for which an inability to pay fines and fees puts them at greater risk of falling into bankruptcy or unemployment. Due to the former fines and fees system, Cook County received the unfortunate title of nationwide leader in Chapter 13 bankruptcies, with roughly two-thirds of Cook County bankruptcies including vehicle debt to the City of Chicago.

Following initial approval from City Council, the Mayor’s Office worked in partnership with the City Clerk’s Office, to announce a debt forgiveness program focused on compliance and ticket debt, which was launched in late 2019. The City Sticker and debt relief program has already helped 11,400 motorists and forgave \$11.5 million in outstanding debt.

The Mayor’s Office also worked in collaboration with many of its City Department’s to announce additional elements of the robust fines and fees package including the elimination of library fines and fees and introducing the City of Chicago Utility Billing Relief program. The City has also launched the ‘New Start Chicago’ website, a one-stop-shop to educate residents about the new offerings and an additional mechanism to help bring them into compliance.

In response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, Mayor Lightfoot announced that the City of Chicago would temporarily suspend debt collection practices and non-safety related citations and impounds, as well as penalties for late payment. The penalty relief package directed a temporary suspension of late fees and defaults on payment plans, including city tickets, utility bills, parking and red-light citations, booting and other non-public safety relates



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violations while no new interest would be accumulated on current compliance plans. These measures represent one of the administration's many efforts to help reduce the financial impact of COVID-19 on city residents and will remain in place through June 1, 2020 – in accordance with the State's Stay at Home' order.

Chicago is one of the largest cities in the nation to tackle fines and fees reforms this comprehensively and it's pleased to join this cohort of additional U.S. cities who have implemented similar reform policies and providing pathways to compliance. Residents can get more information on signing up for payment plans and other City debt forgiveness initiatives available year-round by visiting the "New Start Chicago" website at [www.Chicago.gov/newstartchicago](http://www.Chicago.gov/newstartchicago).

Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice is a network facilitated by PolicyLink, the City of San Francisco's Financial Justice Project, and the Fines and Fees Justice Center, each nationally recognized for their work advancing racial and economic equity through research and advocacy.

Cities and counties selected in the inaugural cohort are Allegheny County, PA, Chicago, IL, Dallas, TX, Durham, NC, Philadelphia, PA, Providence, RI, Sacramento, CA, Seattle/King County, WA, Shelby County, TN, and St. Paul, MN. To learn more about the Counties & Cites for Fine and Fee Justice visit the site [here](#).

### **About Cities & Counties for Fine and Fee Justice partners**

**The San Francisco Financial Justice Project** is the nation's first effort embedded in government to assess and reform fines, fees, and financial penalties that disproportionately impact low-income residents and communities of color. Working with community organizations, advocates, city and county departments, and courts, the Financial Justice Project has spearheaded the elimination or reduction of dozens of fines and fees and lifted millions of dollars in debt off of tens of thousands of local residents. The Project's accomplishments are listed here, and here is a guide to available fine and fee discounts for San Francisco low-income residents.

**The Fines and Fees Justice Center** seeks to catalyze a movement to eliminate the fines and fees that distort justice. FFJC's goal is to eliminate fees in the justice system and to ensure that fines are equitably imposed and enforced. FFJC provides resources, makes critical connections, offers strategic advice, and serves as a hub for the fines and fees reform movement, working with impacted communities, researchers, advocates, legislators, justice system stakeholders, and media all across America. For more information on fines and fees work around the country please see the searchable FFJC Clearinghouse here.

**PolicyLink** is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic



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equity by Lifting Up What Works. Over the last several years, PolicyLink has worked to educate advocates and government leaders about the harmful impact of fines and fees on low-income communities, particularly those of color. PolicyLink is a leading proponent of the Families Over Fees Act (also known as California Senate Bill 144), potentially groundbreaking legislation that would eliminate virtually all criminal fees in California. PolicyLink is also a steering committee member of Debt Free Justice California, a statewide coalition committed to ending criminal legal system policies that disproportionately penalize low-income people.